

A True Breakthrough for Teaching Baseball and Softball Skills to Young Players

The New *SUREHITTER*[™] from J2R2, ...“*It Works!*”[™] ”

In the history of baseball and softball instruction, never have teachers been able to completely control the position and speed of a real ball. This is the central achievement of the new *SUREHITTER* from J2R2. Until now, this ability has been so unimaginable to instructors, that they don't initially recognize the doors opened by the *SUREHITTER*. At first glance, the *SUREHITTER* looks almost too simple, and it is even sometimes mistaken as a variation on “HitnStik genre” devices. But when they see a demo, read the instructions or look at the videos on the company's website, all these misconceptions evaporate.



To understand what distinguishes the *SUREHITTER*, it is first important to appreciate that it is a teaching tool, not just a practice aid. This is a major difference. Teaching means increasing a players' skills, whereas practicing means reinforcing pre-established skills whether correct or not. For example, young players usually arrive for their first practice session needing to transition from little or no skills to knowing the fundamentals of hitting and catching.

When asked, coaches and parents usually say the chief barriers to young children quickly learning playing skills are:

- Fear of the ball
- Fear of failing
- Inability to make and sustain eye-contact with the ball
- Undeveloped motor skills and muscle strength

Although just introduced this season, users enthusiastically confirm that the *SUREHITTER* very effectively directly addresses all four of these issues. According to Ron Camp, (President, Cheltenham Little League in PA), “The *SUREHITTER* is a valuable tool that can teach young players to hit and field. ...Without a fast ball coming at them they will learn what they can and cannot hit. This takes the fear out of that process. The manager/coach can also look for a good stance as well as a good swing. It is very easy to break down the process and show step by step how to swing properly.”

The Keys to Effectiveness

The *SUREHITTER* is essentially a 3-foot long handle with a real ball attached below the far end. How is so much accomplished by this relatively simple device? The keys are in the details of the *SUREHITTER* design and in the way the *SUREHITTER* is used by the instructor. As noted, the



SUREHITTER is constructed so the position and speed of a real ball are completely and precisely under the control of the instructor. This fact allows the instructor to move the ball toward the player in the way it actually would if pitched or hit, but at a speed that is never threatening. Hence there's no fear of the ball! In fact, it is done at that speed where the player can calmly maintain eye-contact with the moving ball all the way to bat or glove contact. The player is always succeeding; hence, there's no fear of failure! During the teaching process, the instructor closely observes the player and in particular the player's eyes. The instructor can stop and suggest adjustments to the player's eye usage or body mechanics at any point of the ball motion. Thus, sustained eye-contact is directly taught!

Ultimately, and most importantly, the *SUREHITTER* is used to quickly develop the correct muscle motor control needed for hitting and catching. It does so by enlisting the basic way any new motor skill is developed in people.

The Heart of the Matter: The Basic Way Everyone Learns A New Motor Skill

For hand-eye coordinated skills, we control our muscle movements in one of two ways: either under Muscle Memory control or under Visually Guided control.

Muscle Memory Control

Muscle memory is the nervous system's ability to memorize, or perform automatically, a well-rehearsed muscle motion. These motions are done quickly without thinking. If you have learned to hit a pitched ball "like a pro", you are doing it using Muscle Memory control. Such preprogrammed muscle movement is triggered by a quick visual cue (e.g., when at bat, you recognize a hittable fast ball just as it leaves the pitcher's hand). Muscle Memory controlled movement automatically proceeds very quickly from the cue without further visual feedback, and is precisely what's needed for effective hitting and catching under game conditions.

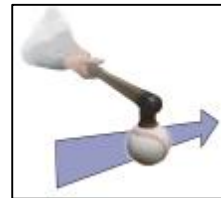
Visually Guided Control

For a new or seldom repeated motor activity however, we use Visually Guided control. Here we continuously adjust muscle movements based on uninterrupted visual feedback. This process is relatively slow. But, it's precisely how we eventually establish the muscle memory needed to create a new Muscle Memory controlled skill. This explains why it is so important to always watch the ball and to start slowly when learning.

So to learn a new motor skill, we must start slowly with repeated movement using Visually Guided muscle control. And then we gradually increase the speed, while repeating the movement under Visually Guided control, until eventually we can perform the skill "automatically" under Muscle Memory control. During this learning process, the role of the eyes transitions from: a) continuously providing the visual feedback needed to create the correct muscle memory, to eventually b) simply giving the person a quick cue as to which muscle memory program to activate for a given situation. The eyes can also give additional feedback for any needed fine adjustments to a Muscle Memory controlled event. Sustained eye-contact is the key in each case.

SUREHITTER and the Progressive Ball-Speed Method

This is exactly the teaching process used with the *SUREHITTER* and is called the Progressive Ball-Speed Method. The instructor starts by presenting the ball slowly, while requiring constant eye contact (Visually Guided control). Once the player's hitting or catching are established and consistent at that speed, the instructor slightly increases the speed level and repeats the process until consistent performance at the new speed level is achieved. This process is repeated up to game speeds. Soon, the player will have created the correct muscle memory for hitting and catching at game speeds. Here, the player simply takes a visual cue from the early stage of the ball's motion and immediately enlists the correct muscle memory for rapid execution (Muscle Memory control) to achieve the desired outcome.



This Progressive Ball-Speed Method relies on three crucial visual cues: a) the *SUREHITTER* presents a real ball to the player, b) the ball is moving the way it actually would in a playing situation (but usually slower) , and c) when hit by the player's bat, the ball responds to the impact as would a freely moving ball. Similarly, if the *SUREHITTER* is used to teach fielding, the ball is caught in the player's glove as would a real moving ball. So the *SUREHITTER* establishes muscle memory based on visual cue's that will be actually encountered during a game! These attributes indeed make the *SUREHITTER* a uniquely effective teaching tool and unlike any other product.

Nothing Else Like It

To date, no other product allows precise and complete control of a real ball's position and speed needed for creating correct muscle memory. HitnStik genre products have a simulated ball, and they even wobble at the end of their poles. Some other products do use a real ball, but their balls' motions and speeds are restricted by strings, chains or other means, often only to move in circles around a pivot. They all have a use for practicing, but definitely not for teaching using the Progressive Ball-Speed Method.

What About More Advanced Players?

Coaches know that more advanced players sometimes have problems with a specific aspect of a playing skill. The *SUREHITTER* is very useful here as well. The instructor can slow things down and isolate the problem; for example a "hitch" in a batter's swing. These problems are incorrect muscle memory programs that can be isolated and quickly "reprogrammed" using the Progressive Ball-Speed Method!

Allows Many Repetitions and is Very Convenient

The *SUREHITTER* allows instructors to give players a large number of "looks" at a pitched ball in one batting session. This solves a big problem for most teams. The same is true for catching balls. What's more, there is no chasing of balls, and no injuries to players from being hit by balls.

For Skilled Coaches or Parents without Prior Experience

In the hands of an experienced instructor, the *SUREHITTER* can be used to effectively teach any aspect of playing (e.g., hitting, bunting, strike zone, catching, etc). In fact, it complements all existing approaches to teaching. Greg Koenig (President, Little League, Aptos, CA) put it this way: “..the *SUREHITTER* brings the coach and player into close proximity while teaching hitting and catching, the coach is really aware of what the player is doing and his/her use of the eyes. For the player, this close proximity creates a strong connection with the coach and a much greater involvement and motivation in what he’s doing. The ball is experienced as being “live’ even though the coach may be momentarily keeping it still.” Any parent who reads the Instructor’s Guide Manual or views the DVD can easily give their child an excellent head start in hitting and catching, and support them during the entire season or seasonal breaks. Again, according to Greg, “It’s a tool that would last a family through many seasons and many children”.

Clear and Immediate Results

When fear of the ball and fear of performance failure are removed, receptivity to learning in young players really takes off. Adding this new player receptivity to a teaching method based on the fundamental way we learn motor skills, makes positive results almost immediate. Initial users are reporting that their teams’ hitting has improved and young players are no longer allowing grounders to slip between their legs. A Little League Coach (of 9-10 yr olds, Los Angeles, CA), after 2 weeks use in hitting practice said: “Just thought I'd let you know that the *SUREHITTER* is working great for our team. We had an offensive explosion today and won 9-5. It all starts with seeing the ball and the kids are doing that much better.” There are even instances where kids previously afraid to participate have become excited players.

Built to Last and Easy to Use

The *SUREHITTER* is well engineered. It is designed to readily tolerate even the high intensity bat impacts from players when they work up to game conditions. The *SUREHITTER*’s handle is a sturdy aluminum tube. The ball is mounted to the handle via all steel parts. The handle and ball mounting hardware have rounded edges and are tough plastic over-coated to protect both the player’s bat and the *SUREHITTER*. The product has undergone hours of extensive reliability testing representing many thousands of typical use impacts, and is backed by a 12 month limited warranty.

The *SUREHITTER*’s weight has been minimized, while the handle is counter-balanced and sleeved with a foam rubber grip. These features combine to make the product feel light when correctly held. And its response to hits is always comfortable for the instructor, a fact that comes as a pleasant surprise to first time users.

Always Safe

No matter what is being taught with the *SUREHITTER*, its movements are always under the complete control of the instructor. Add to this the manufacturer’s recommendation that, when children are involved, an adult must be present. In fact, the *SUREHITTER* can even be used indoors by simply insuring there is ample room for bat swings and *SUREHITTER* recoils. One Little League district did team evaluations using *SUREHITTERS* inside a gymnasium to avoid having the evaluations rained out.

The manufacturer has made user safety a top priority. The *SUREHITTER*'s materials have been subjected to thorough chemical analysis by a renowned independent laboratory to confirm they are completely non-toxic.

Conclusion

As one user put it, "...the *SUREHITTER* fills a gap in playing-skill teaching that never before has been addressed". It can be used to teach, or intervene and correct any aspect of baseball or softball involving a moving ball. The *SUREHITTER* has only been available for a few months in the 2008 season. However, the initial enthusiastic reception of coaches and parents attest to the arrival of a product that is here to stay, and that can make a profound difference in the experiences of young players for years to come. Removing players' fears while directly teaching sustained eye-contact and correct muscle memory make the *SUREHITTER* a true breakthrough for quickly and effectively teaching baseball and softball playing skills.

About J2R2 LLC

J2R2 LLC ("J2R2") (Belmont, CA, USA) develops and commercializes products that can quickly and effectively increase the skills and enjoyment of people participating in sports activities, with a particular view toward making that experience more rewarding for young people.

The SUREHITTER is the first such product to come to market, invented by one of J2R2's founders, Joel Grubman, a public school counselor and teacher for more than 30 years, and a longtime coach and umpire in both Boys Little League and Girls Softball Leagues. J2R2, under the guidance of its seasoned high technology business management, employed top design, engineering and manufacturing talent to produce the SUREHITTER, a product that embodies Joel's invention.

For more information, visit www.SureHitter.com, or contact: cindy@surehitter.com